

Elms community recalls early history

The educational institution known as Our Lady of the Elms was so named on August 22, 1899.

On that very day Thomas Beaven, Bishop of the Springfield diocese, wrote in his journal, "At the suggestion of Rev. John J. McCoy, who was instrumental in the purchase of the Stebbins Place, Chicopee, it was today named 'Our Lady of the Elms.'" The name chosen by Father McCoy was evidently inspired by the magnificent elm trees which shaded the property.

In January of that year, Father McCoy, then pastor of nearby Holy Name Parish, had informed the Bishop that the Stebbins property on Springfield Street was for sale and had been authorized to negotiate the sale. The property was actually purchased a few days later for \$15,000. Seven thousand dollars was paid in cash and an \$8,000 mortgage already on the property was to remain. A prominent Chicopee Irishman, Patrick O'Rourke, a builder who was also a tax assessor, served as intermediary in the transaction. A few days later, the mortgage was increased to facilitate purchase of a small lot adjoining the Stebbins property.

Renovations

Soon the bishop was authorizing changes necessary for the building's use as an academy for girls. The changes, which included installation of new plumbing and hardwood floors, were completed by the time the institution was named, for on September 4 the Bishop blessed the house and Father McCoy said the first mass in the recently renovated section which served as the chapel.

It was clearly the intention of the Diocese from the outset that the new institution would be staffed by Sisters of St. Joseph, a diocesan community since 1883

which was already heavily involved in Catholic education.

The Mother Superior of the Springfield Diocese Sisters of St. Joseph was Mother Mary Albina, born Annie Murphy, who had assumed the leadership role of the community in 1891 at the age of 31. Mother Albina took a keen interest in Our Lady of the Elms during its founding and early years. In effect, Bishop Thomas Beaven and Mother Albina were co-founders of Our Lady of the Elms Academy just as 25 years later their successors, Bishop Thomas O'Leary and Mother John Berchmans, were co-founders of the College of Our Lady of the Elms.



Mother Mary Albina Murphy

In establishing an academy for girls in Chicopee, the diocese was responding to a perceived market for a boarding school to which Catholic families of modest affluence, especially one-parent families, could send their daughters. In fact, two years earlier the diocese had established an academy in Pittsfield staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph, but that institution seems early on

to have evolved into a parochial school for St. Joseph's Parish.

Aside from the availability of an appropriate site for the academy, Chicopee had other advantages. It was conveniently situated next to the seat of the diocese, Springfield. Our Lady of the Elms would be located within prestigious Holy Name Parish, which had been founded in 1838 and was the oldest Catholic parish west of Worcester.

Moreover, Chicopee itself seemed a community on the move at the turn of the century. Its population had jumped from 9,617 in 1870 to about 19,167 at the time of the founding of the Elms.

Period of growth

A famous local resident, Edward Bellamy, had written his renowned novel, *Looking Backward*, a decade earlier. At the beginning of the nineties Chicopee, no longer merely a town, put its first city charter into operation. Fisk Rubber Company, soon to be a major employer, was established in the city in 1892 and Charles Duryea, pioneer automobile maker, was about to launch a company for production of the new vehicles.

History of Our Lady of the Elms: Founding and Early Years

by
Dr. Thomas Moriarty,
Professor of History

Seven pioneer educators found institution

These same years witnessed the growth in numbers and influence of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Fifteen months before the seven sisters arrived in Chicopee to administer Our Lady of the Elms Academy, Mother Albina and Bishop Beaven had broken ground for a new motherhouse at 62 Elliot Street in Springfield. That same year, 1897, Mont Marie in Holyoke, which would play a crucial role in the life of the community, became the new summer home for the Sisters of St. Joseph.

By late summer of 1899, the new academy was being staffed by seven Sisters of St. Joseph who had been assigned to the new institution. Community records provide the names of the seven: Sisters Mary Valerian, Mary Justinian, Mary Emmanuel, Mary Alacoque, Mary Chrysostom, Mary Genevieve, and Mary Simeon.

Examination of their family background indicates that all were of Irish extraction, thereby reflecting the dominant Irish influence on the turn-of-the-century American Catholic Church. One of the seven was born in Ireland and at least four of the remaining six had Irish-born parents. Five of the original seven sisters were born in various parts of New England; one, Sister Mary Valerian, was born in Canada.

Since at the time of the Elms' founding few American women, particularly those of recent immigrant background, had university educations, it is all but certain that none of these women possessed bachelor's degrees. The records indicate that several of them had attended parochial high schools.

Thirty-two year old Sister Mary Valerian whose family name was Katie McDonald, was superior of the Elms sisters during the first year of the Academy; an early account describes her as the person "to whose future care this institution was to be entrusted." However, Sister Mary Valerian's impact on the Elms was cut short by her death in 1904, very likely of tuberculosis.

Gracious atmosphere

Early descriptions of the academy grounds portray a bucolic setting of spacious lawns, fruit trees, flowers and shrubbery. The first floor of the renovated Stebbins home, now called the academy, included a music room, a large classroom whose ceiling design symbolized the "Light of Knowledge"; and a small chapel with a

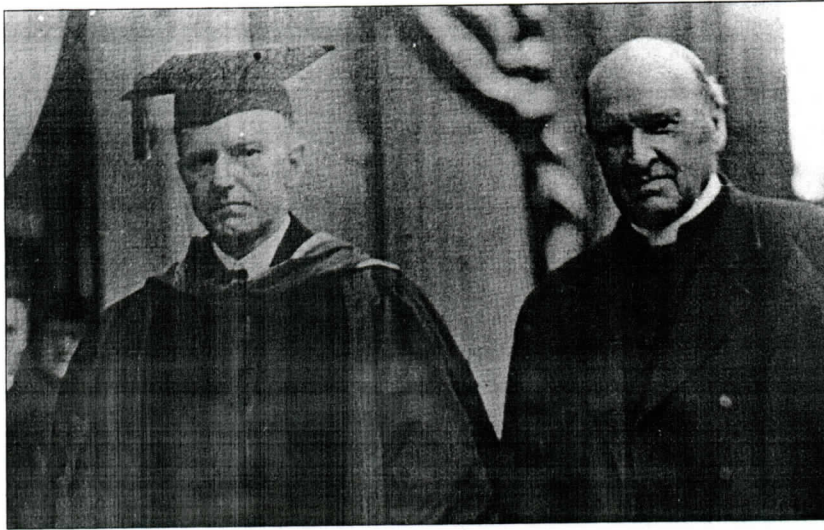
stained-glass window, a white and gold altar, and a wall painting by one of the sisters of the Flight into Egypt. The main hall had an organ and a bust of Pope Leo XIII which was a gift of Father McCoy. A walnut staircase to the second floor led to an art room, another classroom, two bedrooms and a sleeping room for the sisters. The third floor was exclusively for sleeping quarters. Each floor had a bathroom and showers.

From the cupola atop the building one could view the surrounding area. Even the then famous Summit House on Mount Tom in Holyoke was visible.

The sources available to us make it difficult to determine the number of young women studying at the academy in the early years. A diocesan history published at the



Boarding students at The Academy, 1900. Several later became Sisters of St. Joseph: front row: Jennie Flanagan, Welthia May Snow, Jennie Cavanaugh; second row: Sadie Murphy (Sr. Rose Michael), Kitty Dunne (Sr. Rose Carmelita), Angela Moran (Sr. Rose Agnes), Pansie Shaw, (Name unknown) Healy, Mary Carlin; third row: Sadie Kane, Jennie Kelly (Sr. Thomas Daniel), Katherine Keenan (Sr. Margaret Elizabeth), Annie Kelly (Sr. M. Seraphim), Mary Kenny, Margaret Stanton (Sr. Agnes Cecilia); fourth row: Annie Otis, Agnes Neary, Martha Lythgoe (Sr. M. de la Salle), Ada Godfrey, Lucy Joyce, Bridget Hussey (Sr. Mary Gualberta), Nora (Honor) Begley (Sr. Mary Marcella), Annie Casey, Catherine Begley (Sr. Mary Hyacinth).



President Calvin Coolidge with Most Rev. Thomas D. Beaven, Bishop of Springfield.

time of the academy's opening mentions twenty students in attendance. They varied greatly in age; only eleven actually graduated during the first five years. Between 1906 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 the academy had 19 graduates. However, the number of graduates was slowly increasing.

Whereas the largest number during the first five years was four, 1913 saw twelve graduates and 1914, ten. Moreover, as early as 1902 three of those recognized at graduation received post-graduate degrees and by 1913 and 1914 the number of post graduates exceeded the number of high school graduates.

The ethnic background of the early graduates mirrored that of the sisters. Irish names like Keenan, Kane, Fitzgerald, O'Toole predominated; 1906 graduate Leona Irene St. James was a rare exception. An Academy account book for 1899 to 1908 with addresses of the students indicate that a majority were from nearby communities in this early period though a minority were from Rhode Island, eastern Massachusetts and from as far away as Newark, New Jersey.

Boarding students

Obviously these were among the students who boarded at the academy. The percentage of students who were boarders in the early years is impossible to determine exactly. However, within ten years or so of its founding, an Elms publication promoting the institution reminded the public that accommodations were available for only a small number of boarders. So, presumably commuters outnumbered boarders.

Room, board and tuition in the early years of the Elms was \$210 per year; tuition alone for commuters was \$100. Laboratory and medicine fees totaled \$8. Extra fees were charged for instruction in music, painting, stenography and typewriting. The amount collected from students for the opening semester in 1899 was \$1119.66.

During the next five semesters that amount fluctuated between \$1317 and \$3394. Families were expected to pay cash in advance for each semester. In November 1908 those with unpaid balances received a letter which reminded them that this policy was set forth in "Our Prospectus." "We would appreciate it very much," the letter continued, "if you could send us [a] check to balance this account before the 1st of December, as we have some heavy

obligations maturing at that time." By 1924 the cost of room board and tuition had doubled to \$400 for residents. Tuition for commuters had risen to \$200.

Post-graduate studies

A pre-World War I Elms publication informed the public that the Sisters of St. Joseph offered "ample facilities" to young women "desirous of entering upon an under-graduate or post-graduate course of study." The term undergraduate refers to grammar school and high school. The post-graduate course refers to work beyond the high school level. The program for undergraduates included all studies "common to grammar and high schools." Moreover, parents of under-graduates could arrange for "special studies." The publication stipulated, however, that the "honors of graduation" were conferred on only those students who successfully completed "the regular course or a satisfactory equivalent."

Normal School

The post-graduate courses, which, as noted, were available as early as 1902, were described as normal, classical or elective. Presumably the "classical" courses were those in the traditional liberal arts and sciences. By 1908 or 1910 the term Normal School of Our Lady of the Elms was in use: Its aim was "to train young women to teach in the schools of the Commonwealth." Those admitted to the Normal School had to have fifteen units of secondary school work; they had to submit a record of courses taken, a certificate of graduation and references.

**Post-graduate
program
trains
teachers**

Summer studies at Mont Marie engage faculty

The Normal School program was described as a two-year course of study which gave "training in the best methods of presenting the branches of knowledge to be taught as well as practice in actual school-room teaching." Courses were typically offered in 45-minute periods.

The first-year program emphasized the liberal arts and sciences but it also included educational psychology, music and physical training. Religion courses taught by priests of the diocese were part of the curriculum both years.

Much of the second-year program directly prepared students for a teaching career. It included the history of education, methods courses in reading and music, observation and practical teaching.

It is clear, then, that from a very early point in its history, the Elms saw teacher preparation as a vital part of its mission.

What of the qualifications of the faculty who taught this many faceted curriculum? There was obviously a need to supplement the formal education of the sisters who taught at the Elms in those early years. Mont Marie played a crucial role in fulfilling that need, for soon after its opening in the late 1890's it became a summer school as well as a vacation and retreat house for the Sisters of St. Joseph. Both Bishop Beaven and Mother Albina recognized the need to improve the education of women religious whose community's major mission was teaching.

Teacher Preparation

In 1897 the Sisters of Providence hosted a Teachers' Institute in the chapel at Brightside attended by Sisters of St. Joseph as well as members of their own community, and from 1898 on, summers at Mont Marie included guest lectures and intensive short courses. Mother Albina would announce by letter the topics to be taught during the summer session; she would also give sisters the opportunity to engage in private study.

The early summer school programs at the Mont were particularly geared to meeting the needs of educators. Sisters were

encouraged both to study methods of teaching appropriate to the level in which they were engaged and to move into new areas of study.

In 1907 and 1908 Rev. Edward A. Pace, a Ph.D. in psychology from Leipzig University, and later Vice Rector at Catholic University, and Rev. Thomas E. Shields, founder of the Sisters' College in Washington, lectured in psychology. Sister Consuelo Aherne in her history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield reminds us "how innovative — even daring — the study of psychology was in Catholic institutions in the first decade of the twentieth century." These lectures may well have influenced the early incorporation of educational psychology into the curriculum of the Normal School at the Elms.

The community's historian may not have exaggerated when she described Mother Albina as "an outstanding and visionary educator" who "enabled sisters to develop their native abilities and to become more effective teachers." And this was at a time when few Americans, especially Catholic women of recent immigrant background, had even a high school education.

Nineteen eleven must have been a difficult year for fifty-one year old Mother Albina Murphy. For reasons that are unclear, her relationship with Bishop Beaven had deteriorated, her health was in decline, and she was about to be replaced as superior general of the community. However, that year, she movingly paid homage to the teaching profession in a letter to the community:

It is only through our work as teachers that we can give our Community that repute and prestige which we all so ardently desire; it is only through our life as religious teachers that we can merit the respect of the Catholic world; it is only by a constant zeal for greater efficiency that we can be worthy spouses of our Lord and Master-Teacher.



Bishop Thomas M. O'Leary with Elms baseball players.

Elms Archives

Mother Albina's fervent commitment to education surely had an important impact on the mission of Our Lady of the Elms which she helped establish and which she profoundly influenced during its early years.

In those early years the Elms fostered an environment which, according to that day's standards, helped the institution fulfill its mission, a mission stated in rather exalted language in an early publication of the Elms Alumnae: "... to fit all who come beneath its influence to worthily take their places in office or classroom or home, as earnest, useful and noble women, well qualified for the duties and the activities of Christian womanhood."

Quiet atmosphere

The belief at the time was that, during this period of preparation, young women should be sheltered from the world as they studied, prayed and played. Thus the Elms told the public, "The site is healthful, the locality cheerful, quiet and secluded." Students were not permitted to leave the grounds unattended and at all times they were under the care of a sister. Why would students want to leave a place of "shaded lawns and cozy nooks," of "walks that lead to orchard, field and wood," that "allure the pupils to outdoor recreation and bid them, like the sundial on the campus, to count 'naught but sunny hours.'?"

The supervisory role of the sisters over students in the early days may well strike contemporary students as extreme, but it was the norm at other educational institutions for women. The influences of the outside, secular world must be minimized; a convent-like atmosphere was appropriate. Students were required to wear a black uniform. Sisters had the right to inspect all written communications, books and magazines received by students.

Every Sunday the girls were obliged to write to their parents or guardians. Regular visiting times were the second and fourth Sundays of each month from two to five in the afternoon. The only visitors allowed were those authorized by their parents and sanctioned by the sisters. During the periods allocated for class or study, students were not free to visit the parlor. Parents and guardians were asked to direct telephone messages to Sister Superior since students did not have use of the telephone. Not surprisingly, attendance at classes was compulsory.

The Elms mission, of course, required serious attention to the spiritual life of its students. As noted earlier, religion courses were an important component of the curriculum. At an early point a chaplain was assigned to the academy; he taught courses in Christian doctrine, biblical studies and Church history. The Rev. James F. Ahern, Chancellor of the diocese and Rector of St. Michael's Cathedral, is specifically mentioned in early Elms documents as frequently celebrating the liturgy on campus and giving biblical lectures on Sunday afternoons.

Religious devotions

By the early 1920's priests from Our Lady of Hope Church in Springfield began serving as chaplains. On First Fridays all-day exposure of the Blessed Sacrament was followed by evening Benediction. May Days included religious processions, the decoration of shrines to the Blessed Mother in various classrooms, and evening devotions.

The role of Bishop Beaven was particularly evident at graduations. In the early years an "Address to the Bishop" was a standard feature of the ceremonies and Commencement Day itself began with the Bishop celebrating mass on campus.

Social activities

The highly supervised environment at the Elms in the early years, however, did not preclude ample opportunities for entertainment and socializing among the students. A diary kept by one of the sisters between 1900 and 1924 reveals a variety of activities in which students participated. She records trips by students, in the company of priests, to Mount Tom, Mountain Park, Westfield and Huntington. In April, the diarist noted, they had their first baseball game. The same year students had parties on Valentine's Day, Washington's Birthday and Columbus Day.

A day's outing at Mont Marie, first given by Bishop Beaven, seems to have become an annual event which was continued by Bishop O'Leary. By 1922 our diarist describes the trip to Mont Marie as a day given "through the kindness of the Bishop" which by then was called "Bishop's Day." "He joined us," Sister writes of Bishop O'Leary, "and entered into all the games with the students."

On May 2, 1923 he was not only present at a baseball game on the Elms campus, but pitched for the post-graduates. Two days later he pitched for the high school students and on May 5 he played first base. The bishop's participation in the latter athletic event evidently did not impress our diarist for she immediately follows up her entry with the underlined words "Very poor game."

*Daily
schedule
balances
varied
elements*

New properties provide amenities

The Soph Show may have its roots in the early years of the Elms. In February 1913 students performed the operetta "The Tyrolean Queen" and in the fall of that year they put on a minstrel show. Some years later Mother John Berchmans, who had by then replaced Mother Albina as Mother superior, was entertained by a student rendition called, believe it or not, "Precious Pickle."

Physical education long predated the Maguire Center for Health, Fitness and Athletics. The course of study of the Normal School included "Physical Training" during both the first and second years.

This training must have served the students well, for extraordinarily long walks, presumably in the company of a sister, were a regular activity of students. The anonymous diarist quoted earlier mentions that on October 5, 1920 Elms students attended the services surrounding the removal of Bishop Beaven's body from the episcopal residence to the Cathedral; then, "All students walked home to Chicopee."

The following year she casually mentions a group walking from the Elms to Mont Marie and back. And on November 1, 1922 she records a "long walk" — it lasted from 1:30 to 6:10 — through Chicopee and Chicopee Falls. In those simpler days, these long walks were no doubt a form of entertainment and an important opportunity for socializing.

By the time of the armistice which ended World War I in 1918, the Elms had expanded beyond the original Stebbins es-

tate acquired in 1899. Several other structures had been purchased and the Chapel had been built.

Campus expansion

The first property acquired, very likely in 1902, was the home of one Thomas McCarthy which was located on the north side of the Stebbins property, by then christened the academy. Soon after, the Bixby home, situated on the opposite side of the academy, was purchased. It is likely that one of these structures was renovated and became "The Refectory" which was used as a dining area until the 1920's.

One of the most interesting buildings used in academy and normal school days was Veranus Casino which also became known as College Hall. This intriguing structure was located at the corner of what is now Springfield Street and Casino Avenue. It was built sometime between the 1870's and the early 1890's of gray stone and it had a stained glass window. The land on which it was situated was formerly owned by Veranus Chapin, a pioneer Chicopee farmer and a descendant of early settlers in the area.

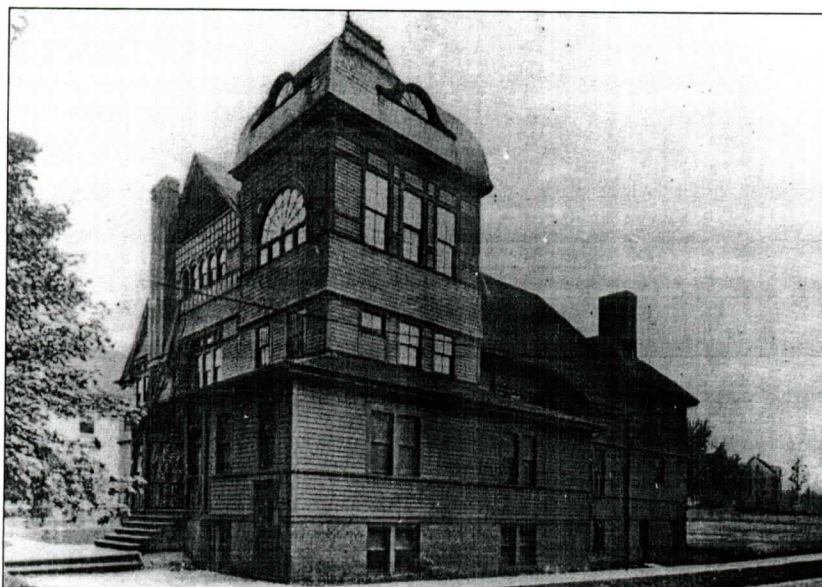
The Diocese acquired the structure around the turn of the century and it was used extensively by Elms at least until the

1920's. From 1907 on, graduation ceremonies were held there. It was also used for entertainment and lectures. For example, in 1909 a Rev. W.H. McKenna gave a talk on *Hamlet*. The annals of the Sisters of St. Joseph provide us with details:

The galleries and boxes were filled . . . and the floor was reserved for high school pupils from parochial schools of Holyoke, Springfield, Chicopee and Chicopee Falls, and all the girls from the academy. A delegation of Sisters came from all the near missions and over eighty had the pleasure of listening to a delightful lecture.

A very important acquisition in 1907 was the property of Justin Spaulding, formerly a well known grocer in Chicopee Center.

The three-story house was an example of Queen Anne style architecture and had been built in 1886. Mother Albina and two other nuns took possession on January 6 and two days later Bishop Beaven celebrated the first mass there. An early record of payment by the Elms Academy for the period 1908 to 1912 shows nine entries for interest payments on the Spaulding property ranging from \$359 to \$593.



Veranus Casino

Elms Archives

Almost immediately the Spaulding house began to be referred to as either "The College" or "St. Joseph's College." It was in this building that the high school graduates who were enrolled in the normal school resided and had their classes.

Faculty members

Two sisters who played prominent roles during the academy and normal school years were Sisters Agnes Marie and Mary Urban. The former was Catherine H. Harrington who was born in Springfield in 1873 of Irish immigrants.

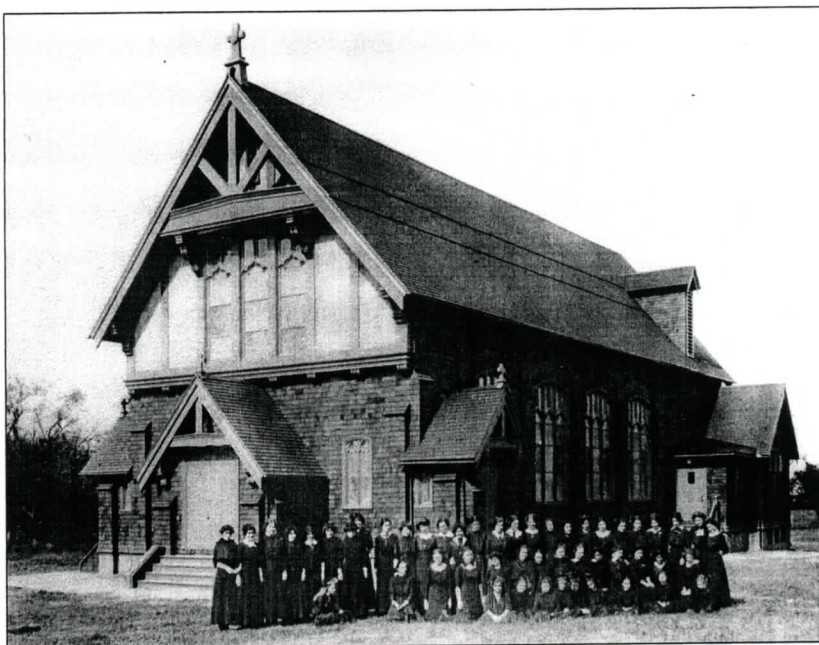
From 1917 Sister Mary Urban played a key role in the normal school. She was Winifred A. Mullany, born in Worcester of Irish-born parents in 1881. She entered the community at the age of 32.

She had been educated at a Worcester public high school and at Worcester State Normal School. By the late twenties she held bachelor's and master's degrees from Fordham University and Canisius College respectively. Sister Mary Urban's credentials surely help explain the dominant role she played in the academic life of the Elms in these early years.

The Chapel dates back to 1912 and 1913. Its construction was a key event in the early years of the Elms. The structure was the first actually built by the institution; it seemed a statement of permanent intention to remain in Chicopee as a center of Catholic education.

Architecturally the Chapel is an amalgam: It possesses features of both Queen Anne and Tudor styles. It also exemplifies the then brown-shingle style which was popular in the period. In fact, two other early examples of this style were the since demolished Unitarian church at the corner of Springfield Street and Fairview Avenue, and the Grace Episcopal Church at 156 Springfield Street.

Until 1913 the only chapel on campus was the room in the academy which had



Students gather near the Chapel.

been renovated in 1899 for that purpose. So, given the centrality of religion at Our Lady of the Elms, the new structure responded to an important need.

Ground was broken on October 4, 1912 and the first brick for the foundation was laid on the thirty-first of that month. In June 1913 the Chapel was dedicated and the first mass was celebrated there on June 21.

The following October Sister Mary Justinian, one of the original seven sisters assigned to the Elms in 1899, wrote to Bishop Beaven "respectfully" asking permission "to erect the Stations of the Cross in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Elms." We do not have Bishop Beaven's response, but it is likely that the stations repaired and refurbished by the college artist, Theresa Amiot, in the late 1970's, date from the original construction of the building. Sister's request to Bishop Beaven is evidence of the degree to which the Diocese, indeed the Bishop himself, exercised ultimate authority and control over the institution.

The Chapel underwent other changes in the next few years. The tabernacle was replaced in 1919 and in 1921 a new organ

costing about \$2500 was installed. Unfortunately we do not know the name of the chapel's architect, but the contractor was a Denis Murphy of Chicopee. Between December of 1912 and February of 1913 Murphy received four \$1000 payments from Bishop Beaven for work on the Chapel. Reports for the payments, presumably signed by Murphy, are housed in the Diocesan Archives.

When Denis Murphy died in 1924 Mother Albina — no longer Major Superior, in fragile health and near the end of her own life — wrote in her journal, "We do not forget the faithful services Mr. Murphy rendered the first years of the Elms. They were of earnest and untiring labor for the building up of Our Lady of the Elms." She went on to describe him as "a noble character" who possessed a "good kind heart."

*Elms erects
Chapel, first
structure*

Plans evolve for higher education

She herself died on February 20, 1925. The following June, the Elms Alumnae adopted a series of resolutions paying her a touching tribute: "Our Lady of the Elms," it read in part, had lost "one who rendered a conspicuous service in its development and progress."

New era coming

By the time of the deaths of Denis Murphy and Mother Albina a new day was dawning for Our Lady of the Elms. To the academy and the normal school a four-year college was soon to be added. The co-founders of the institution in 1899, Bishop Thomas Beaven and Mother Albina, had been replaced by the co-founders of the college, Bishop Thomas O'Leary and Mother John Berchmans.

While it is difficult to arrive at exact figures, the numbers attending in the years after World War I were definitely increasing. The anonymous diarist quoted earlier mentions 63 students as of September 17, 1920 and 84 by two years later.

According to a lengthy article on the Elms which appeared in the *Springfield Union* on June 15, 1924 on the occasion of the institution's twenty-fifth anniversary, 22 students had graduated that month. The article cited a total enrollment of 113 during the 1923-1924 academic year: "... 10 girls in the elementary department, 50 in the high school grades and 53 in the normal training course." Elms alumnae now numbered 125.

In June 1923 Mother John Berchmans was soliciting donations for a building fund and on July 5, Bishop O'Leary, in the pres-

ence of forty sisters from Springfield and Chicopee, to quote our diarist, "witnessed the turning of the sod for the new Our Lady of the Elms." The architect, John W. Donahue, was also present. The building on which work actually began on July 9 was soon to be known as O'Leary Hall. When completed in 1924 the building housed a dining room, a gymnasium, dormitories, receptions rooms, and a library.

Mother John Berchmans' diaries are evidence of her meticulous attention to all necessary details as preparations were made for the formal opening of the building for the 1924-1925 academic year. On March 24, 1924 she had what must have been a lengthy interview with Bishop O'Leary. Three of the seven items discussed with the Bishop, all duly recorded in her diary, had to do with the Elms. In her typically terse style she records the third: "Aim to make — Chicopee — College. Higher Learning." So by the mid-1920's an important new chapter in the history of Our Lady of the Elms had begun: plans for a four-year Catholic college for women were well under way.

The seeds which grew into the College of Our Lady of the Elms were planted one hundred years ago. It is appropriate, therefore, that in 1999 we pay particular attention to those years before the Elms Academy and Normal School became a four-year college. Considerable continuity between then and later is recognizable. The close and loving connection between the institution and the Sisters of St. Joseph which has persisted to our own day was present from the beginning. The Diocese of Springfield, in the persons of Bishop Thomas Beaven and several diocesan clergy, played a key role in the launching and early development of the institution. Though in modified form, the diocesan link has continued.

The place of religious studies in the curriculum from the earliest years, as well as the elaborate attention to Catholic liturgical and devotional services, reflect the concern for the spiritual development of the student body. The concern continues and in this centennial year has motivated the establishment of a broad-based committee to re-examine the college's Catholic identity.

Important features of the later academic program of the college are also identifiable in these early years. The classical courses which were part of the post-secondary curriculum from the beginning represented a commitment to the liberal arts and sciences which has persisted.

Educating educators

Before the college existed, the Elms, through the normal school, was committed to producing qualified teachers who would staff public and parochial schools in the area. The article which appeared in the *Springfield Union* on the occasion of the Elms' twenty-fifth anniversary made special mention of alumnae who had entered the teaching profession. Obviously the strong education department of today's Elms has roots which reach back nearly a hundred years.

This same *Springfield Union* article alluded to alumnae who "have taken hospital training and are now nurses." Clearly the college's perennial concern with education of its students both for life and for a living was already a motivating force in the pre-college period.

So, while much has changed since those early years, much has remained.

Perhaps a deepened understanding of its origins and early history can help the College of Our Lady of the Elms clarify its mission and give it an authentic sense of direction as it begins its second one hundred years.

Early roots flower with growth of college

With the academy and normal school well rooted, the time seemed right for a further branching out on the Chicopee campus. On June 3, 1924 an article in the *Springfield Union* made reference to the fact that O'Leary Hall was to be dedicated in September 1924. Named in honor of Bishop Thomas M. O'Leary, this building became a very important part of the college. Although it served additional uses in 1924, from the inception of the college in 1928, it has been a residence hall for students. In fact, it was the only residence hall until 1944.

In November 1927, the Sisters of St. Joseph petitioned that a college, the College of Our Lady of the Elms, be empowered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to confer such degrees as are conferred by other colleges for women. In the *Springfield Union* on November 29, 1927, a legal notice stating the above petition was signed by: Margaret Frances Somers (Mother John Berchmans), Mary E. Clark (Sister Francis De Sales), Mary A. Horrigan (Sister Mary Baptista), and Catherine Louise Shea (Sister Mary Eulalia).

Charter conferred

In February 1928, the legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts granted a charter to the College of Our Lady of the Elms to confer all degrees usually granted by colleges in this state except degrees in medicine and law. Most Rev. Thomas Mary O'Leary became the first President of the college. On September 21, 1928 the college admitted its first class, the Charter Class, composed of 36 students.



Mother John Berchmans Somers

Three Sisters of St. Joseph comprised the faculty: Academic Dean Sister Mary Baptista Horrigan, Sister Helen Joseph Powers, and Sister Mary Cornelius Sheehan. In 1929 they were joined by Sister Teresa Marie Madden; and in 1930 by Sister Mary Urban Mullany, Rev. J Alfred Lane, and Rev. George Shea; in 1931 by Sister St. Ignatius Doyle. Also in September 1928, Rev. Patrick Doyle was named the first Vice President. In the beginning the administration of the college was placed in his competent hands. He served in this position until his death in October 1935.

On November 14, 1929 ground was broken for the Administration Building. It is remarkable to note that for neither O'Leary Hall nor the Administration Building was there any kind of fund-raising drive. On April 14, 1931 the Administration Building was occupied for the first time. The Charter Class was completing its junior year. On

May 16, 1931, the Charter Class held its junior prom in Veritas Auditorium. At that time no seats had been installed. On June 13, 1932, the first commencement exercises were held in Veritas Auditorium. Twenty-four graduates received bachelor of arts degrees.

Accreditation achieved

Two things seemed to have characterized the college from the beginning, struggle and hope. The struggle was immediately evident. Although the college was approved by many educational associations, it had to make various attempts for at least ten years before it was accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in 1942.

For the first years of its existence the college program was based on the liberal arts wherein every student followed the same program. In order to receive this coveted NEASC approval, in 1937 the college introduced a new curriculum providing for students to concentrate (major) in a particular field of study.

In the midst of the great concern about accreditation, the college experienced a great loss, when in 1938, a hurricane destroyed many of the stately elm trees that graced the front of the campus.

The College Years:
**Struggle
and Hope**
by
**Sister Nora
Harrington**

College broadens curriculum, adds majors

In 1940, to bring variety into the program, two laymen with doctoral degrees, one in biology, the other in chemistry, were hired to introduce majors in those subjects. Finally, through the efforts of Mother John Berchmans, assisted by Monsignor John R. Rooney, vice president since the death of Msgr. Doyle in 1935, the college was finally accredited in December 1942.

The major career specialization in education continued as it had been since 1928. Although Sister Mary Liguori O'Hara was appointed academic dean in 1935, Sister Helen Joseph Powers was the chief administrator of college programs from 1936 until 1947. To add diversity, and to make the program more attractive, Sister James Mary Foley introduced a program in journalism with the initiation of *Elmscript*, the college newspaper, in 1945, and *Tourmaline*, a literary magazine, in 1946.

Era concluded

In 1944 the academy closed and the building was renamed Beaven Hall. Also in 1944, the Pease property, acquired circa 1938, became a residence and was named St. Thomas Hall. These two buildings housed cadet nurses during World War II. They served as residence halls until they were demolished to allow for construction of the College Center, Rose William Hall, and the Library.

Enrollment and finances became abiding problems and reasons for struggle.

There was no significant change in enrollment: 24 graduates in 1932; 22 in 1937; 24 in 1942; 24 in 1947; until 1952 when there were 68 graduates, then 57 in 1957. At the same time, finances improved very slowly. Tuition was the main source of income. In 1932 tuition was \$150 per year; in 1942, \$175; in 1947, \$225; in 1952, \$300; in 1957, \$400 per year. It can easily be seen that the resources of the college were not great. The college could not have operated without the contributed services of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the diocesan clergy.

In 1947 Sister Rose William Murphy was appointed academic dean. With hope of easing the struggle by attracting more students, she began to expand the curriculum. In 1948 Sister John Martha Joyce introduced a sociology major, and in 1954, with Rev. Vincent O'Connor, a social work program. Sister Margaret James McGrath and Sister Nora Harrington introduced a medical technology program in 1953. Also, in 1953, Sister James Mary Foley began an evening school program.

The struggle again became apparent when, in 1953, Bishop Weldon questioned the fact that enrollment was growing so slowly. At that time it was 249 and tuition was \$300 per year. Sister Rose William introduced the programs mentioned above. Enrollment began to increase and housing became a problem. New hope was experienced. In 1957 St. Mary's Hall was constructed and became the residence for 54 seniors. The total undergraduate enrollment was 374.

Corporation created

Also, in December 1957, the college was established as a corporation. The legal corporate title is "The Trustees of the College of Our Lady of the Elms."

In 1958, Sister Rose William Murphy was appointed president, the first woman, and the first Sister of St. Joseph to assume this position. Sister Helen Clare Fenton became academic dean. In 1961 Marian Hall, which had been the home of the junior professed Sisters of St. Joseph since 1954, became a residence for traditional students. In 1962,





Lighting a fire to burn the mortgage on Alumnae Library brings delight to former president Msgr. Thomas Devine and President Mary A. Dooley, SSJ in 1992.

the college purchased property on Springfield Street. This became St. Paul's Hall, affectionately called by students OCC, Off-Campus Castle. In 1963 Bishop Weldon purchased the Gaylord estate as a gift to the college. This residence was named St. Joseph's Hall. In 1963 Sister Rose William was able to negotiate a low-interest HUD loan for the construction of a college center and of a large residence hall on campus, now known as Rose William Hall.

Monsignor Thomas Devine became fourth president in 1965. In September 1965 the College Center and Rose William Hall were opened. By this time, tuition was \$800, and enrollment was 583. However, in 1965, the largest freshman class ever was recruited, 230 members.

The 1960's were turbulent times for most colleges. However, Monsignor Devine handled things well. He worked to improve the internal spirit of the college. He insisted on a strong student government, and through the introduction of a committee system allowed for faculty participation in governance. In 1972 Sister

Mary F. Honnen became academic dean. In 1973 Sister Nora Harrington assumed this position.

Increasing enrollment and expanding programs caused the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to recommend that library facilities be improved.

Library built

Under the direction of Librarian Sister Teresa Daniel Walsh and Monsignor Devine, the library was constructed, and opened in September 1973. At the same time the campus planners, Dober and Pad-dock, were responsible for giving the campus a new and attractive look, with O'Leary Hall, the Administration Building, the Library, and the College Center forming a quadrangle.

Between 1970-1972 alumnae raised about \$225,000. Monsignor Devine also negotiated a bank loan to cover the cost of the library.

In 1975 the College became a member of the Interstate Certification Compact. This allows students who have successfully completed the requirements of the Educa-

tion Department, and who are also approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to be accredited in 32 states. Monsignor Devine resigned as President in 1975, effective February 1976.

Dr. Edward R. D'Alessio became president in 1976. He faced the continuing struggle with enrollment and finance by beginning a development program, and in 1977, under the leadership of Sister Kathleen Kirley, a continuing education program.

Programs added

In 1978, through her efforts and research, Sister Nora Harrington began a nursing program that had an immediate positive effect on enrollment. Also, in 1978, two new programs began: business management directed by Dr. Eileen Rosenberg, and the communication disorders program directed by Mrs. Marion Sweeney. In 1978, the college celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the granting of the charter.

Also in 1978, Dr. D'Alessio solicited the assistance of the alumnae in fund-raising. Hope was generated when the general Alumnae Association voted to amortize the debt on the library and directed all alumnae giving to this purpose. They succeeded in burning the mortgage on the library on Homecoming Day in 1992. In 1979 Bishop Joseph Maguire approved a diocesan-wide collection that netted \$73,804.

*New
structures
transform
campus*

Elms offers master's degrees, Weekend College

In the spring of 1979 Sister Mary Dooley was named sixth president. Sister Nora Harrington was appointed vice president, and Sister Mary F. Honnen, academic dean.

Sister Mary Dooley was immediately introduced to the struggle. Enrollment was 377 and the deficit was about \$360,000. She also faced two other challenges, a fund-raising campaign and a re-accreditation visit.

Challenge met

Hope was engendered when Bishop Maguire and Monsignor Timothy Leary asked Attorney Charles Ryan to chair a capital fund drive. The college had to raise \$750,000 to match a \$250,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. With the assistance of many friends this goal was accomplished.

Sister Mary F. Honnen was appointed to chair the re-accreditation committee. Instead of the traditional kind of report, she prepared a planning document. Full accreditation was granted in 1982 with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges praising Sister Mary Dooley and Sister Mary F. Honnen when they stated in their report, "It is ironic and unfortunate that the excellence of the Elms is not more widely known."

From 1981 to 1984 the budget was balanced. Sister Maxyne Schneider became academic dean in 1983. Enrollment dropped in the mid-eighties. The director of admissions was encouraged to introduce an enrollment management program. Dr. Daniel Casey, appointed academic dean in 1987, changed the student to faculty ratio from 9.1 to 1, to 14 to 1.

At the 1982 homecoming, the library was named Alumnae Library as this was also the 50th anniversary of the Charter Class.

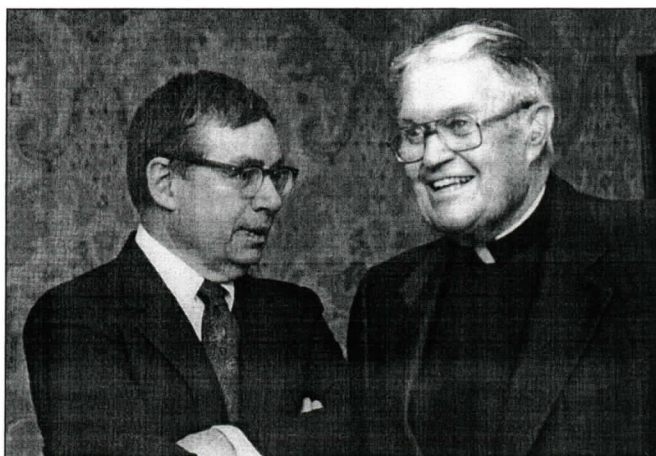
In 1983 Attorney Katherine Currier introduced the paralegal program. Also, in 1983 the Administration Building was named Berchmans Hall.

Then, under Sister Kathleen Kirley, the Weekend College began in 1987, as well as the Master of Arts in Teaching program. In 1989 full-time enrollment was 500, and continuing education enrollment was 527.

In 1990 Dr. Patrick Delaney became academic dean succeeded in 1997 by Dr. John Freed. Under the leadership of Sister Eleanor Dooley, the Master of Arts in Applied Theology program began in 1990. In 1992 the college was again re-accredited. In 1992 a capital fund drive to raise money for a health, fitness and athletic center was launched. In May 1994, the college center was named the Mary Dooley College Center and in 1994 the chapel was moved to a more prominent site.



In 1983: Academic Dean Mary Frances Honnen, SSJ; Executive Vice President Nora Harrington, SSJ; President Mary A. Dooley, SSJ.



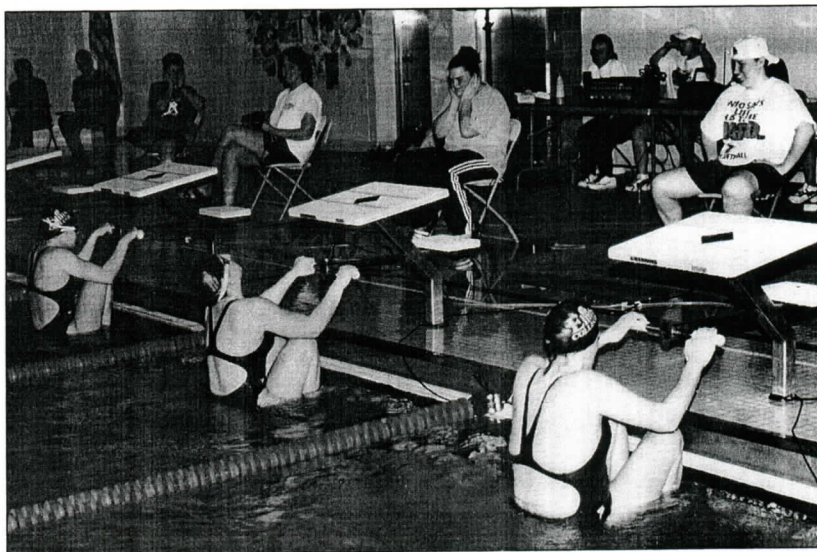
Atty. Charles Ryan and Msgr. Timothy J. Leary

On July 1, 1994, Sister Kathleen Keating became the seventh president. She immediately faced the struggle and a challenge. On October 1, 1994 the college was awarded the prestigious Kresge Foundation Grant of \$400,000 with the provision that \$842,000 be raised for the funding of the Maguire Center by October 1, 1995. Remarkably, due to Sister Kathleen Keating's leadership, this challenge was met by that date.

In February 1995, Sister Kathleen Keating outlined the overall process for a new cycle of strategic planning that would involve the entire college community.

An Implementation Committee oversaw the formation and work of several groups studying various areas. One of these groups investigated the issue of coeducation.

The committee discussed their findings and in May 1997 presented a recommendation to the Board of Trustees. On October 7, 1997 it was announced that the college would admit men to all programs beginning in September 1998. In the summer of 1998 adjustments were made to accommodate men to live and study on cam-



Elms Athletics

pus. In September 1998 the first group of 36 men were admitted. They have been well received. The transition has been a pleasant one.

Identity examined

As part of the Strategic Plan, Sister Kathleen Keating began the 1998-1999 academic year by asking the entire college community to reflect on the college's Catholic identity. A Catholic Identity Committee was formed. Eleven discussion groups were es-

tablished. Reports from these groups were submitted to the chair of the Catholic Identity Committee in May 1999. Plans for implementation of these reports were given in the fall of 1999 along with an Implementation Plan for 1999-2000.

Sister Kathleen Keating, well aware of the characteristics of struggle and hope that have been the college's hallmark since its beginning in 1928, is realistically appreciative of the college's many accomplishments, and faces the problems of today's Elms with courage and conviction. She aptly leads the college with trust in God and in Our Lady of the Elms into a new century and the third millennium.

This factual account of 75 years of Our Lady of the Elms has merely touched on the struggle and courage of administrators, faculty, and staff who have met these challenges with joy and hope.



Michael Dalesi

Members of the Committee on Catholic Identity: back row: Trustee Chair Daniel Melley, Rev. Daniel Liston, Monsignor Richard Sniezyk, Religious Studies Professor Dr. Martin Pion, Trustee Rev. Hugh Crean; front row: Campus Ministry Director Mary Sue Callen-Farley, President Kathleen C. Keating, SSJ; Bishop Thomas Dupré, Committee Chair Kathleen Kirley, SSJ.

*College
implements
coeducation*